

METHODIST CHURCHES.

The Quadrennial Methodist Episcopal Conference

WHICH WILL MEET AT OMAHA

Next Week—Something About the Work of the Session—The Most Important Meeting for Years—The Question of Lay Representation and the Admission of Women Delegates to be Decided.

Written for the Intelligencer.

It so happens that presidential year is always a great Methodist year, and that just before the meeting of the political conventions there is held in one of the large cities what is known as the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The last assembly of this kind was held in New York in 1888, and now, the requisite four years having elapsed, we are upon the eve of another such convocation, the favored locality this time being Omaha. It will convene on the 2d of May, and so great will be the amount of work before it, that a final adjournment will be reached only when May itself adjourns, and even then, judging from the past, it will not be ready to adjourn. Out of the thousand or more propositions submitted to the last conference, deliberation was taken upon about a hundred; the remainder, when the final doxology was sung, were either on the table or under it, and in that unsettled situation have they been compelled to remain—for the good of the church probably—while another quadrennium has gone by.

This conference, which meets only in presidential years, is, in some respects, the most important gathering in which Methodists ever convene. From the standpoint of sentiment it must perhaps yield the palm to the Ecumenical Conference which met in Washington in October last, and in London ten years before. But judging by the power inhering in the two bodies, and by what they can do along practical lines, the first place must unquestionably be given to the body which convenes next week in Omaha. The last named body, it is true, does not represent the Methodism of the world, but it does represent the most extensive branch of Methodism. Besides, it has many great offices to fill, while the Ecumenical had in its gift—beyond the few honors bestowed during its brief session—neither dignity nor emolument. In one respect the Ecumenical was only a big Methodist class meeting. The brethren were called together merely for the exchange of views and the cultivation of good feelings. They could talk *ad libitum* and they did this; it must be admitted, in excellent spirit, with signal ability and with untiring perseverance. We may reasonably expect, too, that there will be no end of speech-making at Omaha. In former sessions of the same conference it has been nothing unusual for thirty or forty to clamor for the privilege of the floor at the same time, while the spectacle of any measure appealing in vain for someone to throw light upon it is a wholly unheard-of occurrence in that body. But the general differs from the Ecumenical Conference in the fact that besides being endowed with the gift of utterance, it likewise possesses an enormous power of legislation.

AN IMPORTANT MEETING.

From this point of view the approaching quadrennial convocation is not only superior to the Ecumenical Conference but it far outranks the annual conferences. The latter are merely executive and administrative bodies. They have no power to enact laws; the whole of this inheres in the conference which meets every fourth year. From this body must emanate all changes in polity and all modifications of the discipline. In fact, with a few reservations—instances in which the acts of the general conference are rendered legal only by the concurrent action of the annual conferences—the body which holds its approaching session at Omaha has entire control ecclesiastically, not only of all the ministers of this branch of Methodism, but of all the members, of even those exceedingly privileged characters, the bishops, and, what is perhaps still more important to practical minds, of all the vast property interests and all the inerting offices.

To appreciate fully what this means we must dig into figures a little. The Methodists of this continent number a little less than five and a half millions. The enrolled communicants number that many, or nearly so, and if for each member we allow the addition of two adherents who are not members, we see at once that this prospective gathering at Omaha will effect in some measure a Methodist constituency aggregating about sixteen millions of people. Of course the influence of the conference upon the great bulk of these will be slight and wholly indirect. But over more than two-fifths of this great constituency its control will be at once direct and supreme.

THE SOUTHERN BRANCH.

That enterprising and prosperous branch of Methodism known as the M. E. Church South—the second largest of all the denominations into which Methodism is divided—will be represented in this conference only in a fraternal sense. It will send greetings by honored delegates, and will no doubt be deeply interested in whatever the conference may do. Possibly, too, its policy and feelings may be modified to some extent by the spirit of brotherhood the gathering may exhibit. This will surely be the case should favorable action be taken upon the memorials to be submitted looking toward organic union of the two bodies. Still, this is not the conference of the Church South, but the general conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and its decisions, therefore, can only affect in any binding sense the members of that church. When it is remembered, however, that there are nearly two million and a half of these—not counting adherents—and that this church, in the aggregate both of its benevolence and membership, is far in the lead of all other Methodist churches, it will be readily seen that in speaking of its quadrennial conference as one of the greatest convocations in which Methodists ever convene, we have kept quite within the truth, and that we have not at all overestimated either its direct influence or the power it must exert indirectly—being the governing body of the largest amongst them—over the Methodist churches in general.

This conference is a delegated body. It consists of picked men from both the clergy and laity. The fifteen thousand ministers of the M. E. church are divided into one hundred and thirty-one annual conferences, and every four years each of these makes its selection, generally by ballot, of the men who are to represent it in the quadrennial conference. The ratio is one delegate for every fraction of two-thirds of that

number. A conference which is large enough to send two or more ministerial delegates sends also two lay delegates. These are not elected by the ministers, but by laymen, who meet in conference by themselves for that express purpose. Some of the annual conferences are so large that they send as many as six ministerial delegates; but the laymen are allowed not more than two, and where but a single minister is sent, only one. This gives to the laity a representation in the law-making body of only about one-third. In the last general conference the figures were: ministers, 281; laymen, 175. The elections to the coming assembly are not yet complete. The full returns, however, will show a similar disproportion, though there will be a slight increase in the totals.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS.

Naturally the laymen are dissatisfied with this state of things. Paying the bills of the church, they feel that they ought to have more influence in making the laws and filling the offices. But the ministers think differently. Required to vote not long ago upon the proposition, whether laymen should be allowed equal representation in the general conference with themselves, they met the issue by an emphatic negative. The vote in favor of equality was 2,892; against 5,476. To effect such a change as this, not only must the ministers be favorable, but they must assent to it by a three-fourths majority. Instead of this, however, they put themselves on record during the present quadrennium by a majority of almost three-fourths on the opposite side.

Another proposition which the ministers in their annual conference have failed to indorse is that which looked toward the admission of women into this governing body. It was virtually decided by the last general conference that the question of woman's eligibility was a constitutional one and that the movement to admit her must go through the regular constitutional course. This required, as in the other case cited, a three-fourths majority of the ministers voting in the annual conference, and a two-thirds majority of the delegates to the general conference. How the body last named will vote, remains to be seen, but the proposition is already defeated for the present. It has secured a majority, but not a sufficiently large majority to make it a law, the vote being 5,692 in favor of admission and 5,151 against it. The vote of the laity on this subject—which counts, however, only as an expression of opinion—was: For, 235,668; against, 163,813.

SOLUTIONS PROPOSED.

Both of these questions will engage the attention of the brethren at the conference about to convene. So far as legislation is concerned, they will be the most interesting topics that body will consider. It is not possible that the laymen will be any better satisfied with a minority representation than they were four years ago; nor is it conceivable that "woman, lovely woman" will rest content under her ban of exclusion. At the last general conference the woman question was under debate for about six days. It was a hard nut to crack, and the orators on both sides brought all their strength to bear in the effort to extract a satisfactory kernel. After all, however, the question is still unsettled, and it is not in the least unlikely that we shall hear over again in the coming conference the same arguments pro and con which were thrashed out in the last, and shall witness, also, in the effort to have women seated on an equal footing with men, the same scenes of ever-memorable excitement.

As to the admission in larger numbers of the laymen, this is opposed strenuously by many of the ministers, not so much because they object to the principle involved, as from the fact—to state the case broadly—that they are human, and do not, therefore, like the idea of taking the bread out of their own mouths. To send lay delegates to general conference in equal proportion with the clergy, would mean that finally a smaller number of the clergy could enjoy this honor; for to make the conference two-thirds larger than it is, or even one-third larger, with the two orders sitting together, and with the sessions continuing through a whole month, is a prospect not to be thought of for a moment.

Possibly a solution may be reached by providing that the laity and clergy shall deliberate separately in different buildings. Meanwhile it is proposed to relieve the situation at the gathering about to convene by seating the two orders on opposite sides of the house. Heretofore, the laity and ministry have been mixed up, and the point has been made that such an arrangement tends to keep the laymen in the background; that they not only cannot muster as many votes as the clergy, but that, as the case stands, they have less chance than their more numerous and more valuable brethren to secure the privilege of the floor. What will be done in this matter we shall know shortly. But it goes without the saying that having to adjust so many matters of delicacy with the woman question still on its hands and the struggle for equal rights between clergy and laity clamoring for settlement—to say nothing of the many high officials it will have to elect, and the many changes of discipline it will be asked to make—this conference will have plenty to do, and will attract to itself a large share of public attention.

Galtoun's Lawyer Dead.

BALTIMORE, Md., April 25.—Charles B. Reed, of counsel for Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield, is dead in this city, aged fifty-eight years. Mr. Reed made his residence in this city for the last four or five years.

Turned Informer.

MADRID, April 25.—Munoz, the anarchist has been liberated to become a police agent and informer.

THERE is more Catarrh in this section of the country than all other diseases put together, and until the last few years was supposed to be incurable. For a great many years doctors pronounced it a local disease, and prescribed local remedies, and by constantly failing to cure with local treatment, pronounced it incurable. Science has proven catarrh to be a constitutional disease, and therefore requires constitutional treatment. Hall's Catarrh Cure, manufactured by F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, Ohio, is the only constitutional cure on the market. It is taken internally in doses from 10 drops to a teaspoonful. It acts directly upon the blood and mucous surfaces of the system. They offer one hundred dollars for any case it fails to cure. Send for circulars and testimonials. Address: F. J. CHENEY & CO., Toledo, O. Sold by druggists, 75c.

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Children Cry for Pitcher's Castoria.

BLAINE'S FIRST SWEETHEART.

Their Estrangement Occurred at a Party. She Still Lives, Unmarried.

Frank Burr, in New York Press.

WASHINGTON, Pa., April 25.—"He did not walk the forests and rocks like a wolf, but dwelt with men in their delights." That was the sort of man Eph Blaine was, and right before us stands the old house where he lived while one of our country officers. Up the hill yonder is the home of his famous son's first sweetheart, and a romantic bit of his early history lingers about it. All the Blaine children of that day were educated here, and the town is still full of pleasant recollections of them.

An old lady, sitting in her cozy parlor, gave me reminiscences of the secretary of state when she and he were schoolmates together.

"Did I know Mr. Blaine as a boy? We called him Jim then. I like that name best, despite the fact that the honors he has won, make it respectful for all to give him a title. As I knew him when a girl of his own age, and have read in his career ever since, I believe he would rather have us, who knew him as a boy, speak the name familiar to our ears in the early days, than the more pretentious one achievement and custom have given him.

"There are a number of the old scholars and friends in social life living who recall his first appearance among us. We never regarded him as much of a student. After he left here and we heard that he was teaching we wondered at it, for he was by no means the best scholar at the college. He could learn too fast and was too fond of fun. In fact, something like his father. Life here was then as uneventful as it is now, and the town has not changed much since those days when Mr. Blaine graduated at 17 and left us, to return only as a visitor."

"Why did he go?"

"There was something of a love affair at the bottom of it. He went about a good bit with the girls, and the high character of his family gave him a place among the best. His first sweetheart was one of the prettiest and nicest girls in the circles in which both moved. Her father occupied a high position in professional and social life. His daughter was in nowise behind him in the esteem of this community. She and young Blaine, according to the general belief, were engaged to be married, although both were very young. One of those lovers' misunderstandings which will always occur among young people began at a social entertainment and never ended. None of us who moved in the same realm knew of the strained relations between them, until he came back some time afterward and did not call upon her. Then, of course, all were aware that the tie had been broken. Both were too proud and respected each other too much ever to speak upon the subject, and I doubt if any one to this day except themselves know the true reason for their estrangement."

"She is still living and never married, whether from choice or from a lingering sentiment for the first love which touched her heart, no one knows. Her name need not be mentioned for it would do no good. The summit of her life has been passed and her sun looks well to the west."

DID SHE FOLLOW HIM TO WASHINGTON?

The many romances connected with the Blaines in their family history are known and heard here from many people of the highest character. The story about the young lady and the quarrel is frequently spoken of, and the one generally accepted is that the girl never forgot her sentiment and frequently visited Washington to go into the halls of Congress and sit in the gallery to see her first lover come and go out, and listen to his speeches upon the great questions of the day. This fireside talk was suggested to the more than bright woman who had recalled the caprices and pleasures of schoolboy life.

She drew herself up, and there was a deal of flash in her eye when she replied with spirit:

"I do not believe it, although I know that this is the general talk in the social circles here. She went to Washington frequently; but her pride, of which she has plenty, would have prevented her from showing any such devotion to him or any one else, even had she felt ever so sentimental. I do not think they ever spoke after the estrangement which took place at that country party where they parted forever. She was a high spirited girl as she is a woman, and her determination could not be easily changed."

A BOYHOOD PICTURE.

"Are there any of his old schoolmates here?"

"Yes, a great many. There is another lady in this town about my own age who has many interesting reminiscences of the statesman's early life. The most famous picture taken of Mr. Blaine when he was going to school here is hers, and every effort has been made for many years to get it or a copy from her, but money and friendship have both failed to secure it, and I do not think that any earthly inducement could get it from her. It represents him as one of a group of three young lads who were quite chums then."

"In the tintype, besides Mr. Blaine, is Colonel Thomas Searight, the noted politician, who lives over in Uniontown, not far away. The other is that of Jim Clark, who resides at Cannonsburg, where the college was before it was moved here. Mr. Blaine's two companions in that boyhood picture are both ardent and prominent Democrats, still living, while the lady who holds it is as fully wrapped up in the same political faith as her sex will admit."

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